

UNITED CHURCH OF HUNTINGTON
POSITION PAPERS COMMITTEE REPORT

By the unanimous agreement of the Position Papers Committee, it is recommended that the position papers of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (the "4Cs"), as set forth at <http://www.cccusa.com/about-us/position-papers/>, be adopted by the United Church of Huntington ("UCH") as currently written, with the exception of 4Cs paper 2 (Statement Regarding the Ministerial Standing of Women) and 4Cs paper 5 (Policy and Guideline Regarding Ministers Who Are Divorced). In the place of 4Cs paper 2 (Statement Regarding the Ministerial Standing of Women), it is recommended that UCH adopt the UCH Position Paper Committee statement on The Biblical Roles of Men and Women in Church Leadership. In the place of 4Cs paper 5, it is recommended that UCH adopt the UCH Position Paper Committee Statement Regarding Elders/Pastors Who Have Been Divorced.

Respectfully submitted by the Position Papers Committee on September 24, 2018.

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UNITED CHURCH OF HUNTINGTON
POSITION PAPERS COMMITTEE

THE BIBLICAL ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Position

After a diligent study of the Scriptures and much prayer, and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Position Papers Committee presents the following as the Biblical roles of men and women in church leadership:

1. Among the many leadership roles in the church, only the offices of pastor and elder are reserved exclusively to men.
2. We strongly encourage men and women who are so gifted and called to use their gifts in leadership to equip their local church to build the Kingdom of God.

Discussion

A healthy New Testament church functions effectively when its members regularly exercise the gifts God has given to them for His glory.

The Old Testament includes several examples of godly women who did just that. Miriam, Deborah, and Anna listened to God and prophesied the words they received. Miriam and Deborah showed great courage in their leadership. Miriam protected Moses, and Debra demonstrated wisdom as a judge and political leader who led her people to victory over their enemies. Likewise, God used queen Esther's extraordinary courage, revealing her true identity, to save her people. Esther's courage is still celebrated by Jews to this day.

The New Testament also includes female heroes of the early church. Women like Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Lydia, Tryphena, Tryhosa, and Persis were commended in writing by Paul for their great labors in service of the Lord.

It is clear that both men and women can, and do, serve in leadership roles in Christ's Church.

This being said, there are two roles which are reserved to men, pastor and elder. Paul writes about these roles in 1 Timothy 3: 1-12, and again in Titus 1:5-9. In each case, Paul describes the qualifications for these roles and states that these leadership positions are to be filled by "a man of one wife". He further states in 1 Timothy 2:12 that he does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but rather instructs women to receive instruction and learn in quietness and full submission (1 Timothy 2:11) and then to encourage and share what they have learned with younger women (Titus 2:3-5).

To some, this may sound as if Paul is calling for the subjugation of women by men. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Men and women are co-heirs with Christ. Paul is exhorting men and women to model the headship of the Father over the Son, a willing submission between equals. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 we are taught that Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ. Would anyone say that the God the Father subjugated Christ the Son? By no means! The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, and each at all times fully God. Yet Christ willingly left his position at the right hand of God the Father to take on human flesh, the Son of Man, and to dwell among us, in full and complete submission to the Father, at great personal cost and sacrifice, in order to accomplish the perfect will of the Father. We as a body of male and female believers should reflect God's perfect unity as co-heirs with Christ, including our submission to God's word and submission to one another.

For these reasons, we will elect only called and qualified men to the positions of pastor and elder, and we will direct them to shepherd us in the adherence to 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

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STATEMENT REGARDING ELDERS/PASTORS WHO HAVE BEEN DIVORCED

The presence of divorce in American life today, together with the increasing incidence of divorce among Christians, confronts our church with the issue of candidates for pastor or elder who have been divorced. It is necessary, therefore, to set forth policy guidelines for the consideration of divorce situations.

A. SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

It is an accepted fact in our church that the Scriptures are the standard by which guidelines should be determined. In this light the sanctity of marriage cannot be overemphasized. When asked His view on divorce, Jesus replied, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man will... be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:4, Genesis 2:24)

God instituted marriage. It is not subject to the changing norms of society. God designed marriage to be a permanent union of a man and woman by which they are made one. God did not allow for divorce in his design. Marriage is a total commitment of two people to one another for life. It is a covenant of companionship.

In the light of Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14, marriage is a covenant relationship before God, and the breaking of a covenant of whatever kind is wrong. Sin is involved in every divorce. According to Malachi 2:16 God hates divorce. That is not to say that God hates people who are divorced, nor is it to say that everyone who is divorced is guilty of the sin that resulted in divorce. Some people are divorced by their mates against their will and in spite of their efforts

toward preservation of the marriage. This raises the question whether divorce per se disqualifies a man from serving as a pastor/elder in our church.

B. SANCTITY OF THE MINISTRY

Even though it might be allowed that divorce in itself may not disqualify a man from the office of pastor/elder, it must be remembered that, in the light of Scripture the sanctity of the office of pastor/elder and the example of such cannot be overemphasized. Paul wrote to Timothy, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless..." (I Timothy 3:1-2). The sacred nature of the office is emphasized by Paul when he says in I Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and the stewards of the mysteries of God." To Titus he wrote, "A bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught..." (Titus 1:7-9). In other words, the life of a pastor/elder must be exemplary in every way because of the high office which he represents, "in all things showing himself a pattern of good works." (Titus 2:7)

Peter admonishes pastors/elders to "feed the flock... taking oversight thereof ... not ... as lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." (I Peter 5:2,3), and Paul reminds pastors/elders that "we are ambassadors for Christ," standing in Christ's stead. Because of the sanctity and high calling of the office, therefore, and because it places the pastor/elder before the church and the world as a pattern of what Christian living should be, the divorce of a pastor/elder is an extremely serious matter. Even though the pastor/elder himself may be innocent of wrongdoing, his divorce can have disastrous and far reaching effects on his congregation and his future ministry.

C. FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Based on the principle of God's forgiveness and restoration, what shall we say of the man who was divorced before his conversion to Christ when he was made a new creature in Christ? If he had been guilty of sexual sin before becoming a Christian, he would not thereby be ineligible for a call from God to serve as pastor/elder. Paul was guilty of murder and blasphemy before his conversion, but God forgave him and made him a pastor/elder. There are men who have been saved out of a life of immorality and debauchery who have become able and effective pastors/elders in the furtherance of the Gospel. Is the breaking of the marriage covenant a greater sin than pre-marital promiscuity? When God forgives our sins, He casts them behind His back (Isaiah 38:17). He casts them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). He remembers them no more (Jeremiah 31:34), and He removes them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). God forgives the sins we confess and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).

D. RELEASE FROM THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

We understand the teaching of Jesus in Luke 16:18, Matthew 5:31 and 32, and Matthew 19:1-9 to say that divorce is wrong, but is allowed in the case of infidelity. The divorce of a man whose wife has broken her marriage vow of fidelity will not automatically disqualify the man from serving as a pastor/elder.

We have also considered the case of a man who has not been guilty of disruption of his marriage by unchristian attitudes and conduct which have driven his wife to seek divorce, and who has made every effort toward reconciliation and the saving of his marriage. If his wife persists in "putting him away" by divorce, he is in no way guilty of violating God's law. If both he

and his wife are Christians, he should remain unmarried and continue to seek reconciliation according to I Corinthians 7:11. If he fails to do so, his eligibility to serve or to continue to serve as a pastor/elder is severely damaged if not destroyed. If, on the other hand, in that situation, the wife who left thereafter remarries or otherwise breaks her marriage vow of fidelity, the man whom she left does not violate God's law if he remarries, according to Jesus in Matthew 19:9.

If the wife in the above situation instead proves herself to be an unbeliever, then according to I Corinthians 7:15, the man "is not bound," and if he is not bound, he is free. He has been released from the marriage covenant. There is a parallel to this in Romans 7:2 and 3 where Paul declares that a woman is "bound to her husband as long as he is alive... But if he dies, she is released from the law and is not an adulteress though she marries another man." In Romans 7 the death of the husband terminates the marriage, and in I Corinthians 7 the willful departure of the unbeliever terminates the marriage. The sense of I Corinthians 7 appears to be that a person who has sincerely sought to preserve a marriage, but has been divorced contrary to his will and effort toward reconciliation, is a free person.

E. LAWFUL – BUT NOT EXPEDIENT

Having said all this, we need to recognize that the traumatic experience of going through a divorce and the possible attitudes of a pastor's/elder's present and future congregations may make it very difficult to carry on an effective ministry. Our church will do well to consider that while it may be lawful for a divorced man to serve as pastor/elder, it might not be expedient. Such a man might better devote his talents, training and experience to some service for the Lord other than as a pastor/elder, such as writing, counseling or administration.

F. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, a man who has been divorced will not automatically be disqualified from the office of elder. In determining whether a divorced man is qualified to serve as an elder, the divorce must not be recent, and the facts and circumstances surrounding the divorce must be clear and undisputed and testified to by those in our congregation whose testimony can be trusted and believed.

The office of pastor is considered by many to be the highest calling in the church. As such, it is imperative that the pastor be beyond reproach in this matter. The ability to ascertain the facts and circumstances of the divorce of a man seeking the office of pastor who is otherwise unknown to our congregation, and to discern the veracity and credibility of the persons testifying to those facts and circumstances, is difficult at best, if not impossible.

It is the strong desire of many in our congregation that we call as pastor a man who has not been divorced, and it is our strong recommendation that we strive to fill the office of pastor with a man who, since his acceptance of Jesus Christ as his savior, has not been divorced.